OLD IRON

An Excellent Story From the Pen of Stacy Aumonier

"IF YOU'D PUT SOME GINGER INTO IT," SHE ONCE REMARKED, "AND NOT ALWAYS BE THINKING ABOUT THE FEELINGS OF THE TRIPE YOU BUY, WE MIGHT HAVE A HOUSE IN THE CAMDEN ROAD."

THE story is familiar to you? well, perhaps so. It is the story of the eternal triangle, the most useful of geometrical forms in the construction of a romantic pattern.

The trouble with human triangles is that they are never equilateral; two sides together are invariably greater than the third side. Jim Canning was the third side of a triangle, and he got flattened out. In fact, his wife used to flatten him out on every possible occasion. She was bigger than he, and she was aided by the tertium quid, Ted Woollams, who was nothing more or less than a professional pugilist.

What was Jim to do? In every well conducted epic the hero performs physical feats which leave you breathless. He is always tall and strong and a bit too quick with the rapier for any villain who crosses his path. But what about a hero who is small and elderly, of poor physique, short-sighted, asthmatical? You may say that he has no place in the heroic arena. He should clear out and go and get on with his job and leave heroism to people who know how to manage the stuff. And yet there was something heroic in the heart of Jim Canning—a quick sympathy and an instinct of self-sacrifice.

He used to keep a second-hand furniture shop, which, you must understand, is a very different thing from an antique shop. Jim's furniture had no determinate character, such as that which goes by the name of Chippendale, Sheraton or Heppelwhite. It was just "furniture." Well-worn sofas, broken chairs and tables, mattresses with the stuffing exuding from holes, rusty brass beds with the knobs missing, broken pots and mirrors and dumbbells; even clothes and screws, false teeth and bird cages and ancient umbrellas. But his specialty was old iron trays and trays and baskets filled with scraps of old iron.

His establishment used to be known in Camden Town as "The Muckshop." At odd times of the day you might observe his small, pathetic figure trundling a barrow laden with the spoils of some hard-pressed inhabitant. What a tale the little shop seemed to tell! Struggle and poverty, homes broken up, drink, ugly passions, desperate sacrifices—a battered array of the symbols of distress. And somemhow in his person these stories seemed to be embodied. One felt that he was sorry for the people whose property he bought. He was always known as a fair dealer. He paid a fair price and never took advantage of ignorance.

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HIS marriage was a failure from the very first. She was a big, strapping woman, the daughter of a local green grocer. Twelve years younger than Jim, vain, frivolous, empty-headed and quarrelsome. Her reasons for marrying him were obscure. Probably she had arrived at the time when she wanted to marry, and Jim was regarded as a successful shopkeeper who could keep her in luxury. He was blinded by her physical attractions and tried his utmost to believe his wife was everything to be desired. Disillusionment came within the first month of their married life, at the moment, indeed, when Clara realized that her husband's business was not thriving as she had been led to believe. She immediately accused him of deceiving her. Then she began to sulk and neglect him. She despised his manner of conducting business—his conscenciousness and sense of fair dealing.

"If you'd put some ginger into it," she once remarked, "and not always be thinking about the feelings of the tribe you buy from, we might have a house in the Camden road and a couple of servants."

This had never been Jim's ambition. Many years ago he had attended a sale at Shorwell Green, on the borders of Sussex, a glorious spot near the down, amid lime trees and little running streams. It had been the dream of his life that one day he would retire there with the woman he loved—and her children. When he put the matter to Clara, she laughed him to scorn.

"Not half!" she said. "Catch me living among butterflies and blinking cows! The Camden road is my game."

Jim sighed and went on trundling his barrow. Well, there it was! If the woman he had married desired it, he must do what she wanted. In any case it was necessary to begin to save. But with Clara he found it exceedingly difficult to begin to save. She idled her day away, bought trinkets, neglected her domestic offices, went to the pictures and sucked sweets. Any attempt to point out the folly of her ways only led to bitter recriminations, tears and savage displays of temper, even physical violence to her husband.

Then there came a day when Jim fondly believed that the conditions of their married life would be ameliorated. A child was born, a girl, and they called her Annie. Annie became the apple of his eye. He would hurry back from the shop to attend at Annie's bath. He would creep in at night and kiss the warm skin of her little skull. He would think of her as he pottered around amid his broken chairs and tables and utter little croons of anticipatory pleasure. Annie! She would grow up and be the mainstay of his life. He would work and struggle for her. Her life should be a path of roses and happiness.

His wife, too, appeared to improve upon the advent of Annie. The baby absorbed her. She displayed a kind of wild-animal joy in its existence. She nursed it and fondled it and did not seem to resent the curtailment of her pleasures. It was an additional mouth to feed; nevertheless their expenses did not seem to greatly increase, owing probably to Clara's modified way of living.

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TWO years of comparative happiness followed. Jim began to save. Oh, very, very slowly! He still had less than £3,000 put on one side for that vague future of settled security. But still it was a solid beginning. In another ten or fifteen years he would still be—well, not quite an old man. If he could save only £00 a year!

It was at this period that Ted Woollams appeared on the scene. He was the son of a manager of a swimming bath. On Sundays he used to box in "Fairyland" for purses of various amounts—he was a redoubtable middleweight. During the week he swaggered about Camden Town in new checked suits, his fingers glittering with rings. He met Clara one evening at a public dance. The mutual attraction appears to have been instantaneous. They danced together the whole evening, and he saw her home.

And then began the squeezing out of the third side of the triangle. Jim was not strong enough for them. At first he professed to see nothing in the friendship. And Ted treated him with a certain amount of respect. He called in at odd times, stayed to meals, drank Jim's beer and smoked Jim's tobacco. The triangle was quite intact. It was Annie who caused the first disruption. She disliked the prizefighter and screamed at the sight of him. This led to reprisals when he had gone, and Jim's championship of the child did not help to cement the always doubtful nature of the affection between husband and wife. There were cross words and tears, and once she pushed him over a chair, and in the fall he cut his temple.

A few days later Ted Woollams called in a great state of agitation. He wished to see Jim alone. It appeared that a wonderful opportunity had occurred to him. It was a complicated story about a quantity of bonded brandy which he had a chance of acquiring and selling at an enormous profit. He wanted to borrow £50 till Saturday week, when he would pay him back sixty. Jim said he would lend him the fifty, but he didn't want any interest.

When Saturday week came, Ted said the deal had fallen through, but he would let him have the money back the following Saturday. In the meantime he came to supper nearly every night. Sometimes he drank too much beer. Then Clara began to dress for the part. She bought expensive frocks and had the accounts sent in to Jim. She neglected the child.

The months drifted by, and Ted was always going to pay, but he became more and more part and parcel of the household. Jim's savings began to dwindle. He protested to both his wife and Ted, but they treated him with indifference. The boxer began to abuse his familiarity. He would frequently tell Jim he was not wanted in the drawing room after supper. When spoken to about the money, he laughed and said, "Oh, you've got plenty, old 'un. Lend us another fiver."

This lopsided triangle held together for nearly four years. Jim was unhappy and distracted. He did not know how to act. He could not leave his wife for the sake of the child. If he turned her out—and he had no legal power to do so—she would probably take Annie with her. And the child was devoted to him. They were great friends, and it was only this friendship which prevented his indulging in some mad act. Several times he ordered Woollams out of the house and forbade him to come again, but the boxer laughed at him and called him an old fool. He knew that his wife was practically keeping him. They went to cinemas together and often disappeared for the whole day, but she always returned at night. It was sometimes 2 or 3 in the morning when she returned.

Jim had no proof of actual unfaithfulness. Neither could he afford to

HE PULLED OUT A LONG JACKKNIFE AND SCRAPED THE SURFACE.

hire detectives, a course of action which in any case appeared to him distasteful. Far from saving a hundred pound a year, he was spending more than his income. His savings had dwindled to barely £40. His business was stagnant, but still he trundled his barrow hither and thither, calling out "Old iron! Old iron!" And he struggled to pay the fair price.

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DURING a great period of his life Jim had enjoyed an unaccountable but stanch friendship with a gentleman named Isaac Rubens. Isaac Rubens was a Jew, in a business slightly similar to his, and he conducted a thriving trade at the corner of the Holy Angel road. Isaac was in many respects a very remarkable man. Large, florid and puffy, with keen eagle eyes and an enormous nose, he was a man of profound knowledge of the history and value of objects of art. He was, moreover, a man of his word. He was never known to give or accept a written contract and never known to break a verbal one.

The friendship between these two was in many respects singular. Isaac was a keen man of business, and Jim was of very little use to him. Isaac's furniture was the real thing, with names and pedigrees. He did not deal in old iron, but in stones and jewels and ornaments. Nevertheless, he seemed to find in Jim's society a certain pleasure. Jim would call on his rounds and, leaving his barrow out in the road, would spend half an hour or so chatting with the Jew across the counter.

Sometimes after supper they would call on each other and smoke a pipe and discuss the vagaries of their calling or the more abstract problems of life and death.

When this trouble came upon Jim he immediately repaired to his friend's house and told him the whole story.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! This is a bad business! a bad business!" exclaimed Isaac, when it was over. His moist eyes glowed amid the general humidity of his face. "How can I advise you? An erring wife is the curse of God. You cannot turn her away without knowledge. Thank God, my Lona—but there, among my people such lapses are rare. You have no evidence of unfaithfulness?"

"No."

"You must be gentle with her—gentle, but firm. Point out the error of her ways."

"I'm always doing that, Isaac."

"She may get over it—a passing infatuation. Such things happen."

"If it wasn't for the child!"

"Yes, yes; I understand. Oh, dear! Very distressing, my friend. If I can be of any assistance——"

He thrust out his large hands helplessly. It is the kind of trouble in which no man can help another, and each knew it. Jim hovered by the door. It's nice to have some one to talk to, anyway," he muttered. Then he picked up his cap and shuffled away.

Annie was nine when the climax came. An intelligent, pretty child, with dark hair and quick, impulsive manners. Her passionate preference for her father did not tend to smooth the troubles of the household. She saw very little of her mother.

One evening when Jim returned home late—he had been on a visit to his friend Isaac—he found Annie seated on the bottom stair in her nightdress. Her face was pale and set, her eyes very bright. She had been crying. When she saw her father she gasped, "Daddy! Oh, Daddy!"

He seized her in his arms and whispered, "What is it, my dear?"

Then she cried quietly while he held her. He did not attempt to hurry her. At last she got her voice under control and gasped quietly. "I had gone to bed. I don't know why it was. I got restless in bed. I came down again softly. I peeped into the sitting room. Oh, Daddy!"

"What? What, my love?"

"That man—that horrid man and——"

"Your mother?"

"Yes."

"He was——"

"He was kissing her—and—oh!"

Jim clutched his child and pressed her head against his breast.

"I went in. He struck me."

"What!"

"He struck me because I wouldn't promise not to tell."

"He struck you, eh? He struck you! That man struck——"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Where is he?"

"Theyr'e up there now. I'm frightened."

"Go to bed, my love. Go to bed."

He carried her up the stairs and fondled her and put her into bed.

"It's all right now, my love. Go to sleep. Daddy will look after you."

Then he went downstairs.

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A SOUND of laughter greeted him through the door of the sitting room. He gripped the handle and walked deliberately in. Ted Woollams was stretching himself luxuriously on the sofa. His heavy, sensual face appeared puffy and a little mussed. Clara was lying back in an easy chair. Jim did not speak. He walked up to Ted and without any preliminary explanation struck him full on the nose with his clenched fist. For a moment the boxer appeared more surprised than anything. His eyes narrowed; then the pain of the blow appeared to sting him. He rose from the sofa with a growl. As he advanced upon Jim the latter thought: "He's going to kill me. What a fool I was not to strike him with a poker!"

He thrust out his arms in an ineffectual defense. There was something horribly ugly, ugly and revolting, in the animal-like lurch of the man bearing down on him. Jim struck wildly at the other's arms, at the same time thinking, "My little girl! I promised to look after her."

A jarring blow above the heart staggered him, and as he began to crumple forward something came crashing to his jaw. He heard his wife scream; then darkness enveloped him.

A long and very confused period followed. His glimpses of consciousness were intermittent and accompanied by pain. He heard people talking, and they appeared strangers to him. There was a lot of talking going on, quarreling, perhaps. When he was once more a complete master of his brain he realized abruptly that he was in the ward of a hospital. His jaw was strapped up tight and was giving him great pain; a nurse was feeding him with milk through a silver tube. He wanted to talk to her, but found he could not speak.

Then he recalled the incident of his calamity. Well, he had been brought up in a hard school. Old iron! The instinct of self-preservation prompted him to bide his time. Doubtless his jaw was broken—a long job—but he would get well again. At the end of the journey Annie awaited him. What was the child doing now? Who was looking after her? He passed through periods of mental anguish and misgiving and then long periods of drowsy immobility. Night succeeded day. To his surprise, on the following afternoon his wife appeared. She came and sat by the bed and said:

"Going on all right?"

He nodded. She looked uneasily around, then whispered, "You needn't have taken on like this. Ted's going off to America tomorrow, fulfilling engagements."

Jim stared at the ceiling, then closed his eyes. Ted no longer interested him. He wanted Annie, and he could not ask for her. Clara stayed a few moments and vanished. Why had she come? Later in the day he was removed to the operating theater, and they reset his jaw. A long while later he remembered a kindly-faced man in a white overall saying, "Well, old chap, who struck you this blow?"

He bent his ear down to Jim's lips, and the latter managed to reply, "A stranger."

Isaac came, hurried and concerned, and pressed his hand.

"Well, well, I've found you, old friend!. A neighbor told me. They say you must not talk. What can I do?"

Jim indicated with his hands that he wished to write something down. Isaac produced an envelope and a pencil, and Jim wrote: "Go and see my little gal Annie; send her to me; keep an eye on her."

Isaac nodded gravely and went away.

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THERE appeared an eternity of time before the child came, but when she did, all his dark forebodings vanished. She came smiling up the ward and kissed him. They held each other's hands for a long time before she spoke.

"They would not tell me where you were. It was old Mr. Rubens. Oh, Daddy, are you getting better?"

"Yes; he was getting better. Much better. During the last two minutes he had improved enormously. He felt that he could speak. He managed to mumble, "How are you, my love."

"All right. Mother has been very cross. That horrid man has gone away. Mr. Rubens said you hurt your face. How did it happen, Daddy?"

"I slipped on the stairs, my dear, and fell."

Annie's eyes opened very wide, but she did not speak. He knew by her manner that she did not believe him. At the back of her eyes there still lurked something of the horror which haunted them on the night when she had discovered "that horrid man" embracing her mother. It was the same night that her father "slipped on the stairs." The child was too astute to dissociate the two incidents, but she did not want to distress him. "I shall come every day," she announced. He smiled gratefully.

From that day the convalescence of Jim Canning, although slow, was assured. Apart from the broken jaw, he had suffered a slight concussion, owing to striking the back of his head against the wall when he fell. The hospital authorities could not get out of him how the accident happened. Annie and Isaac Rubens were regular visitors, but during the seven weeks he remained in the hospital Clara only visited him twice, and that was to arrange about money. On the day that he was discharged he had drawn his last £5 from the bank.

"Never mind, never mind," he thought to himself. "We'll soon get that back."

And within a few days he was again trundling his barrow along the streets, calling out in his rather high tremolo voice, "Old iron! Old iron!"

With the departure of Ted Woollams, Clara settled down into a listless prosecution of her domestic routine. She seldom spoke to her husband except to nag him or to grumble about their reduced circumstances, and these for a time were in a very serious state. Debts had accummulated, and various odds and ends in the house had disappeared while he had been in the hospital. Clara was still smartly dressed, but Annie's clothes, particularly her boots, were in a deplorable condition.

Jim set to work, leaving home in the morning at 7 o'clock and often not returning till 8 or 9 at night. Four months the financial position remained precarious—a period of hunger and ill temper and sudden ugly brawls. But gradually he began again to get it under control. Clara had not lost her taste for good living, but she was kept in check by the lack of means. She was furtive, sullen and resentful. Jim insisted that whatever they had to go without, Annie was to continue with her schooling.

They never spoke of Ted Woollams, but Jim knew that he had only gone away for four or five months. Jim struggled on through the winter months, out in all weathers in his thin and battered coat. Sometimes twinges of rheumatism distorted his face, but he mentioned it to no one, not even Isaac.

It was in April that a sudden and dramatic change came into Jim's life. One morning he was alone in the shop. It was raining, and no customers had been in for several hours. Jim was struggling with the unsolvable problem of getting things straight and sorted out. Beneath a bed he came across a jumble of indescribable things—bits of iron and broken pots, nameless odd-shaped remnants covered with dust and grime. He sighed. He remembered this lot quite well. It had been a great disappointment to him. He had trundled his barrow all the way down to a sale in Greenwich, where he had been given the tip that there were some good things going. He had arrived late, and all the plums had been devoured by rival dealers. He had picked up this lot at the end of the sale for a few shillings; not that the things struck him as a good bargain, but because he did not want to feel that he had completely wasted his day. He had brought them back and dumped them under the bed. That was many months ago, long before he had been to the hospital—and there they had remained ever since.

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JIM'S ideas of dusting were always a little perfunctory. With a small feather brush he was flicking clouds of dust from one object to another. No, there was nothing here of any value, though that piece of embroidery might fetch five shillings, and the small oblong box which some one had painted a dark green might be worth a little more. He picked it up and examined it. A ridiculous notion, to paint iron. But, there, people were fools. Of course, it might be copper or brass. In that case it would be worth more. He pulled out a long jackknife and scraped the surface. The paint was old but incredibly thick. It must have had a dozen coats or so. When he eventually got down to the surface he found a dark blue color. He scraped a little more and found some brown and white. "That's enamel," he said out loud; "an enamel box. Um! I'll show that to Isaac. An enamel box might be worth several pounds."

That evening after supper he wrapped the box up in a piece of newspaper and took it around to his friend. Isaac adjusted his thickest glasses and examined the spot where Jim had scratched. Then he went to the door and called out, "Lizzie, bring me some turpentine."

When the turpentine was brought, Isaac began to work away at the surface with a rag and penknife. His face was very red, but he made no remarks, except once to mutter, "This paint alone is twenty or thirty years old."

It took him nearly half an hour to reveal a complete corner of the box. Then he sat back and examined it through a microscope. Jim waited patiently. At last Isaac put it down and tapped the table.

"This," he said deliberately, "is a Limoges enamel box of the finest period. It is copper, inlaid with enamel. It is an amazing find. Where did you obtain it?"

"I bought it at a sale of the effects of an old lady named Brandt at Greenwich. She died intestate and had no relatives."

"You are in luck's way, Jim Canning."

"But why was it painted dark green?"

"There are many mysteries in our profession. It was probably stolen many years ago, possibly a century ago. The thief knew that the piece was too well known to attempt to dispose of for some time. So for security he painted it in order to hide it. Then something happened. He may have died or been sent to prison. The box passed into other hands. Nobody worried about it. It was just an old iron box. It has probably been lying in a lumber room for years."

"It's been lying in my shop for five months. Is it worth a great deal, Isaac?"

Isaac thoughtfully stroked his chin. "I am of opinion that if it is undamaged it is worth many thousand pounds."

Jim looked aghast. "But I only gave six-and-sixpence for the lot!"

"It is the fortune of our profession."

The upshot of it was that Jim left the box in Isaac's hands. At first Isaac wished to waive the question of commission, but finally agreed to sell it on a 10 per cent basis—fair bargaining on both sides.

Jim returned home almost dazed by the news. Was it fair to obtain such a large sum of money in such a way? And yet, who should have it if not he? The old lady had not even any relations.

He said nothing about his find to his wife or to Annie. He did not wish to buoy them up with false hopes. Perhaps, after all, Isaac might be mistaken. A thousand pounds! Why, he could retire upon it to Shorvell Green, where it was so quiet and peaceful. But no! Clara would not agree to that. The Camden road! He detested the Camden road; but still, there it was. Clara was his wife. It was only fair to consider her wishes.

He went back to his work as though nothing had happened. Weeks went by and Jim heard nothing about the enamel box. And then one morning he received a note from Isaac asking him to call around at once. When he entered his friend's shop he knew that something exceptional had happened. Isaac was excited. "Come into my little room," he said.

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WHEN they were seated he elaborately produced a check from his vest pocket and handed it across the table to Jim. "Here is your little share. I have kept my commission." It was a check for £4,140. Isaac had sold it for £4,600 to a well known collector.

The rest of that day was like a dream to Jim. Truly, he returned and pretended to be busy. In the afternoon he even went out and trundled his barrow, calling out "Old iron! Old iron!"

"I need not do this any more," he thought. His mind was occupied with many visions. It was a bright spring day, with light, fleecy clouds scudding above the chimney pots. How beautiful it would be in that Sussex valei The flowers would be out, and the young pollard willows reflected in the cool streams. Pleasant to lie on the bank and fish and forget this grimy life. And Annie racing hither and thither, picking the buttercups and marguerites and nestling by his side. Freedom! Freedom by one of those queer twists of fate!

The day wore on, and he still continued his work in a dazed, preoccupied manner. When evening came, a feeling of exhaustion crept over him. Yes; probably he was tired. He wanted a rest and change. How fortunate he was. And yet he dreaded breaking the news to Clara. She would immediately demand a complete social upheaval—a new house, new furniture, luxuries and parties, social excitements. During supper he was very silent.

"I will tell her afterward," he thought. Annie was in bed. She should be told tomorrow. But tonight it must be broken to Clara. After all, it was true. she was his wife. He tried to recall the moments of passion and tenderness of the early days of their honeymoon, but all the other ugly visions kept dancing before his eyes. But still, she was his wife, and if she wished to live in the Camden road, well——

It was nearly dark, and Clara went out of the room humming. She seemed peculiarly cheerful tonight. Almost as if she knew. He fingered the check in his breast pocket. She had gone upstairs. When she came down he would lay the check on the table and say, "Look, Clara! See what has happened to us."

And then he would be a little tender with her—try to make her understand how he felt. They would start all over again.

Jim was sitting there with his fingers on the check that was to be their means of reconciliation and with the tears already banked in his unuttered speech when Clara put her head in the door. She had her hat on. She said, "I'm going to the post."

Jim removed his hand from his breast pocket. He sat back and heard the door slam. "I'll tell her when she comes in."

But Clara never came in. He waited half an hour, and then he thought, "She's gone to some dissipation with a friend. I'm sorry she has disappointed me on a night like this, though."

He sat dreaming in the chair till he became suddenly painfully aware of cold. It was quite dark. He lighted the gas. It was 1 o'clock. He felt his heart beating with a physical dread. Something had happened to Clara. He blundered his way out into the hall, where a gas jet flickered feebly, and groped for his overcoat. On it he found a note pinned. He turned up the gas higher and read:

"I'm going off to Ted Woollams. I'm sick of you and the stinking little house. Ted's made a bit in America, and I give you the address. You can do what you like about it, but it's no good you ever trying to get me back.

"CLARA."

It was characteristic of Jim Canning that this note made him cry. He was so sensitive to its utter callousness and ingratitude. Then he dabbed his eyes with his old red handkerchief and went upstairs. He tapped on Annie's door; then he opened it and said, quietly, "Annie, it's all right, my dear. It's only me. May I come in?"

The sleeping child was awake abruptly. She held out her arms.

"I ought not to have woken you up, my love, only I felt a little lonely. Annie, would you like to come away with me to a beautiful place in the country, where it's all woods and flowers and little streams?"

"Oh, Daddy, yes! And would there be lambs, too, and little pigs and calves?"

"Yes, my dear; all those things, and birds, too, and quietness and freedom."

"But, Daddy, could we?"

"Yes, dear; I've had some good fortune."

Annie was very wide awake now, and she sat up and clapped her hands. "Oh, Daddy, when can we go?"

"Quite soon, my dear. Perhaps in a few weeks."

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WHEN he had closed the door, he dabbed his eyes again and thought, "It was unthinking of me. I oughtn't to have woken her up—but she is all I have."

A week later he wrote to Clara:

"Dear Clara: I understand that for the last week you have been living with Ted Woollams. I do not criticize your action. We are all as God made us. I shall in the dew course take divorse proceedings not as a act of hostilety to you but that you may marry the man of your choice and be respectable. I also shall share with you the result of a good deal last week in order that you may not want, and so close with check for £2,070. I think this fair. JIM."

It was Isaac who helped him over all the difficult problems which occurred at that time, and it was Isaac who persuaded him that he was overdoing the "fairness" to Clara. He said that £500 would be lavish. So in the end Jim altered the check to that amount. It was Isaac who took over the little shop, which he used as a kind of dumping ground for his superfluous stock. And it was Isaac who, a year after, returned letters addressed to Jim in a handwriting he recognized. "Gone away. Address not known." And it was he who, in later years, bore the brunt of the wild invective of a drunken harridan who said that her husband had deserted her and would not hand her any of the fortune he must have inherited. He replied that he knew nothing. Mr. Canning and his daughter had left London. He thought they had gone to Australia.

When she had gone he said to himself:

"It would distress Jim to know that a woman who had once been his wife had sunk to such a condition."

As he passed through to the room at the back he smiled and thought. "How fortunate she did not come in here!"

On the table was a large bowl of red and white roses, with the label and card still lying on the table. On the card was inscribed, "With love to Uncle Isaac. A." The postmark on the label was a village in Sussex.

Seaweed as Food.

A MAN of science has predicted that sooner or later "shredded seaweeds," "predigested sargassum," "cream of sea moss" and other nautical foods will be popular articles of diet. That certain kinds of seaweed are edible has long been known, but fortunately the human race has not yet been forced to depend on this source for its regular meals.

Seaweeds have been eaten and enjoyed for centuries and in parts of the orient are a staple article of diet—the literal "staff of life." Many varieties are composed largely of gelatin. These have been eaten for ages by the Chinese, Japanese and the inhabitants of many islands in the Pacific ocean.

Thousands of Japanese coast dwellers gather a sufficient quantity of seaweed in July, August and September to last them until the next season's harvest. The people go out to the marine harvesting fields in rowboats equipped with long poles, to the end of which are attached stout hooks. With these queer implements of husbandry they tear the seaweeds loose from the submerged rocks, then take them ashore and spread them out to dry in the sun. Then they are taken to local factories, where they are boiled, shredded and otherwise prepared for use as food.

A cleaner and more wholesome article of diet cannot be imagined, and travelers who have tried it pronounce it to be both palatable and digestible. There is no reason why it should not take the place of some of the common foods in general use.

As a basis for cheap candies, preserves, jellies, custards and similar products requiring an inexpensive but harmless "filler" it is superior to many of the materials now commonly used. Yet millions of tons of this potentially valuable food are wasted on American shores every year, and throughout the world the waste is so enormous as to be beyond computation.

It is predicted that the time is coming when the farmers of America will save their potato parings for seed. When potatoes become so valuable, or farmers so unscientific, as to make that necessary it will be time to give some attention to the harvesting of the pomme de mer.

A Slayer of Bacteria.

THERE are few more wonderful sights in the world than a winding river shining in the sunlight. But our interest in such a scene may be greatly heightened by the reflection that the sunbeams are not merely beautifying the water; they are engaged in a curious work of the utmost importance to man's welfare. Scientific investigation has proved that sunlight possesses a wonderful power to kill injurious germs in river water.

Where a river is polluted by sewage, millions and millions of dangerous bacteria flourish in its water and are carried along with it to spread disease and death around its banks unless their development is arrested. If the sun does not shine upon such a river it may become a peril to whole communities. But if the sunlight does reach it freely, the germs are destroyed and the water is kept comparatively free from infection.

Experiments in various quarters have shown that sunbeams are able to destroy bacteria in water at a depth of at least twenty inches beneath the surface. One might almost liken the rays of light in such a case to javelins and arrows piercing an enemy, for it has been found that the destructive action is greatly diminished if only the perpendicular sunbeams fall upon the water.

The slaughter of the bacteria is by far the greatest when both perpendicular and oblique rays enter the water uninterrupted. Like a ship in action, the sun is most powerful when it can rake the enemy with a cross-fire. And it has to shoot its tiny arrows of light a long way—almost 92,000,000 miles. But, fortunately for us, they get here and they are effective.